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April 1, 2003

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.  
Director and Chief Medical Officer

**SUBJECT: PROVISION OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT TO FIRST RESPONDERS**

On March 25, 2003, your Board directed the Department of Health Services (DHS), in conjunction with the Fire Chief and the Chief Administrative Officer's Office of Emergency Management to report back in one week on: 1) Options to augment existing personal protective equipment specific to the roles of the Coroner and private ambulance companies as they relate to terrorist incidents; 2) recommendations regarding providing funding for personal protective equipment to private ambulance companies that contract with the County; and, 3) the status of the Fire Department's plan to apply for the Department of Homeland Security Assistance to Firefighters Grant.

### Background

When responding to a chemical, biological, or radiological attack, only a limited number of trained personnel will enter the Warm and Hot Zones and it is only these individuals that will require highly specialized personal protective equipment (PPE). The Coroner is an important component of the first responder group and must be appropriately equipped to enter the affected areas to perform their mandated task of determining cause and manner of death. Surviving victims will be decontaminated before being removed from the field; consequently, most other responders, such as private ambulance company personnel, do not need to enter the Warm and Hot Zones. The goal is to limit chemical, biological and radiological exposure to only specially trained and equipped first responders.

The Department has worked with the Office of Emergency Management and the Fire Chief, and with these principles in mind, proposes the following steps be taken to address the question of personal protective equipment for Coroner's staff and private ambulance company personnel:

#### *Coroner's Department*

The Coroner already is approved to receive \$24,462 for personal protective equipment from the 2001 Equipment Grant. However, this sum only provides for full PPE protection for two staff. Without additional equipment, Coroner first responders will be severely limited in their ability to process more than a few casualties in a timely manner. The Coroner will be included in the grant determination process for the 2002 Equipment Grant program, which is now underway. The emphasis will need to be on Level A suits in order to provide the Coroner staff with the protection needed to work in the HOT Zone. In addition to these funding sources, the Federal Hospital Preparedness grant (commonly referred to as the HRSA grant) allocated to DHS for Fiscal Year 2003-04 allows us to use a portion of the funds for the Coroner's Department PPE needs. Our Emergency Medical Services Agency is committed to providing the Coroner with the necessary training to prepare its staff to use the PPE provided through the HRSA and other grants.

#### *Private Ambulance Companies*

There are very few incidents in which private ambulance company personnel should find themselves in need of PPE in response to a terrorism incident involving chemical, biological, or radiological agents. The role of private ambulance companies in this type of incident is to provide transportation of already decontaminated victims. At most, these emergency medical technicians will need to be equipped with escape hoods and detection equipment. The 2002 Equipment Grant is primarily intended for government agencies. It may be possible under certain conditions to provide a private ambulance company with equipment through the Equipment Grant process, but the entities would need to be specifically contracted by local government to provide a service that requires them to work in the Hot Zone. Unfortunately, current funding under the Equipment Grants are insufficient to meet the County and Operational Area's existing needs. To divert any of the grant dollars to private ambulance companies would take the money from the unmet needs of critical Hot Zone first responders. DHS will continue to explore other possible grant sources to identify potential options to assist the ambulance companies.

The Health Department, in conjunction with the Office of Emergency Management, will meet with both the Coroner's and a representative group of private ambulance providers to discuss the appropriate role for these responding agency partners and to clarify expectations on both sides. DHS also will explore necessary equipment and training

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needs beyond what currently exists, identify possible sources of funding, and provide a report back to your Board in 60 days.

*Firefighters Grant*

The Fire Department is currently preparing an on-line application for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant. This grant requires a thirty percent departmental match. Application will be made in the vehicle category. The Department is requesting a First Responder Interoperable Communications Vehicle at an estimated cost of \$340,000, 30 percent of which will be funded by the Fire Department.

Please let me know if you require any additional information.

TLG:cg

c: Chief Administrative Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Fire Chief  
Department of Coroner